

HOUSE No. 4914

Section 126 contained in the engrossed Bill making appropriations for the fiscal year 2005 (see House, No. 4850), which had been returned by His Excellency the Governor with recommendation of amendment (for message, see Attachment O of House, No. 4901). June 28, 2004.

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The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Four

An Act establishing an alternative education grant program.

Whereas, The deferred operation of this act would tend to defeat its purpose, which is to establish forthwith an alternative education grant program, therefore it is hereby declared to be an emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public convenience.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. Said chapter 69 is hereby amended by inserting after section 1M, as appearing in the 2002 Official Edition, the following section:-

Section 1N. (a) The department of education, hereinafter referred to as the department, shall establish a grant program, subject to appropriation, to be known as the alternative education grant program for the purpose of providing, grants to assist school districts, and Horace Mann and commonwealth charter schools with the development and

establishment of alternative education programs and services to students suspended or expelled from school. The grants shall support the development of alternative education programs which would: (1) allow school districts to coordinate efforts to establish interdistrict regional alternative education collaboratives to provide educational services to suspended or expelled students: or (2) establish a district based alternative education program for those students. The grants may also be used to encourage the use of technology in alternative education programs. The grants shall also encourage voluntary expansion of existing alternative education programs in the commonwealth, and shall be used to provide alternative education programs for students who are at risk of educational failure due to truancy, or dropping out of school. Grants may also be used to assist in developing, programs that provide a range of approaches to address behavior issues, such as behavior specialists, in-school suspension rooms and crisis centers, in addition to out-of-school alternative settings.

Programs designed under the grants shall be developed at the middle and high school levels and shall afford students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma in accordance with section 1D, and to be taught to the same academic standards and curriculum frameworks established for all students in accordance with sections 1D and 1E. The programs shall make use of existing resources in school districts, educational collaboratives, community colleges, and other agencies, service providers, and organizations. Programs shall be designed as placements that, at a minimum, educate students to the same academic standards and curriculum frameworks as taught to all students, address behavioral problems, utilize small class size, address individual needs and learning styles, provide engaging instruction and a supportive environment, and,

where appropriate, utilize flexible scheduling. The programs shall also provide a comprehensive array of social services to support a student's remediation of issues that cause school failure, excessive absenteeism, truancy and school dropout. Grant recipients shall develop remediation plans for students that address both academic and behavioral issues. Grants may also be made available for in-school regular education programs that include self-improvement, behavior management and life skills training to help provide students with tools to better manage their lives and attitudes, to support programs that use family-based approaches, and to assist students and teachers during the transition of students back into regular education classrooms.

A grant awarded pursuant to this subsection, shall require that recipients undertake ongoing program evaluations that document the effectiveness of the program in helping students to achieve academically to the same academic standards and curriculum frameworks required for all students, to develop self-management skills, and to reintegrate and remain in regular education classrooms. In awarding grants, priority shall be given to programs that employ interventions that have been empirically validated.

The department shall establish guidelines governing the alternative education grant program. The guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, a requirement that when a student is transferred to an alternative education program a representative of the school district shall meet with the student and the student's parents or legal guardian to develop an agreement that specifies the responsibilities of the school, the student and the student's parents or legal guardian. The agreement shall, at a minimum, include:

- (1) a remediation plan to address both academic and behavioral issues;

(2) a plan for frequent evaluations and assessments of the student's adjustment, and academic achievement and progress;

(3) a requirement that the parents or legal guardian of the student attend specified meetings or conferences with teachers, or utilize such other means of communication as determined necessary to facilitate communication, to review and assist in the student's progress;

(4) timetable for reintegrating the student into a regular education classroom;

(5) the student's and the parents' or legal guardian's acknowledgement that they understand and accept the responsibilities imposed by the agreement.

(b) The department shall establish a grant program, subject to appropriation, to assist school districts with the development and establishment of in-school regular education programs and services to address within the regular education school program the educational and psycho-social needs of children whose behavior interferes with learning, particularly those who are suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence. As used in this subsection, students suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence shall include, but not be limited to, those exposed to abuse, family or community violence, war, homelessness or any combination thereof. The grants shall support the development of school based teams with community ties that: (1) collaborate with broadly recognized experts in the fields of trauma and family, community violence and with battered women shelters; (2) provide ongoing training to inform and train teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to understand and identify the symptoms and trauma; and (3) evaluate school policy and existing school and community programs and services to determine whether and to what extent students identified as

suffering from exposure to trauma can receive effective supports and interventions that can help them to succeed in their public school programs, and where necessary be referred quickly and confidentially to appropriate services.

Grants may also be awarded to assist school districts in development comprehensive programs to help prevent violence in schools, from whatever causes, and to promote school safety. The programs shall be designed to meet the following objectives: creating a school environment where students feel safe and that prevents problems from starting; helping students to take the lead in keeping the school safe; ensuring that school personnel have the skills and resources to identify and intervene with at-risk students; equipping students and teachers with the skills needed to avoid conflict and violence; and helping schools and individuals to reconnect with the community and share resources.

The department shall develop guidelines governing the implementation of the grant program authorized by this subsection. A grant awarded pursuant to this subsection, shall require that recipients undertake ongoing evaluations of the effectiveness of the program. In awarding grants, priority shall be given to programs that are based on empirically validated interventions.

The department of education, in consultation with the department of public health and the department of mental health, shall establish an advisory committee to assist in implementing the grant program and in assisting public schools in addressing the learning and behavior problems of students who manifest trauma-related symptoms or classroom behavior that interferes with learning. Members of the advisory committee shall include but not be limited to: 3 educators, 1 of whom shall serve as the chair, appointed by the

commissioner of the department of education; 2 leaders in the field of trauma and its relationship to school learning and behavior appointed by the commissioner of the department of public health, 2 leaders in mental health with expertise in family and/or community violence appointed by the commissioner of mental health: 1 leader in battered women's services appointed by the commissioner of public health: 1 leader in the area of homelessness and its impact on children appointed by commissioner of mental health; and, 3 parents, 1 each appointed by the commissioner of education, the commissioner of public health, the commissioner of mental health. The advisory committee, at its discretion, may select additional members with relevant experience including but not limited to child advocates, medical doctors and representatives of juvenile and probate court.

(c) The commissioner shall evaluate annually the effectiveness of programs established under this section including the potential for replicating such programs throughout the commonwealth. The annual evaluation shall also examine whether students in alternative education programs funded under this section are being taught to the same academic standards required for all students, how much time students are spending in the programs, the racial profile of expelled or suspended students and the percentages of the students who are in special education or bilingual education. The commissioner shall also provide technical assistance to school districts seeking to replicate programs funded under this section, and shall provide training for teachers in the development of effective remediation plans for students in alternative education, and in the development of skills, techniques, and innovative strategies to assist the students. In evaluating programs funded under subsection (b), the commissioner shall consult with the

department of public health, the department of mental health, and the advisory committee established pursuant to said subsection (b).

SECTION 2. This act shall take effect as of July 1, 2004.